CLAIMS

1. A polypeptide, which polypeptide comprises or consists of two sequences (a) and (b), wherein:

   a) is an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to:

   (i) of the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22;

   (ii) is a fragment thereof having the activity of a polypeptide according to (i); or

   (iii) is a functional equivalent of (i) or (ii); and

   b) is an heterologous amino acid sequence chosen from the group of: a signal sequence, purification tag, the extracellular domain of a membrane-bound protein, a secreted protein, a starting Methionine, a linker region containing a recognition site for an endopeptidase, or the Fc region from an immunoglobulin.

2. A polypeptide according to claim 1 which comprises the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO:20, SEQ ID NO:22, SEQ ID NO: 27, SEQ ID NO: 28.

3. A polypeptide which is a functional equivalent according to claim 1, characterised in that it is homologous to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22 and has activity as an antagonist of cytokine expression and/or secretion.

4. A polypeptide of claim 3 which comprises or consists of SEQ ID NO: 29 or SEQ ID NO: 30.

5. A purified nucleic acid molecule which encodes a polypeptide according to any one of the preceding claims.

6. A purified nucleic acid molecule according to claim 5, which comprises the nucleic acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO:19, SEQ ID NO:21, or is a redundant equivalent or fragment thereof.

7. A purified nucleic acid molecule which hybridizes under high stringency conditions with a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claim 5 or 6.

8. A vector comprising a nucleic acid molecule as recited in any one of claims 5 to 7.

9. A host cell transformed with a vector according to claim 8.

10. A polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to the

amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22 for use in therapy or diagnosis of disease.

11. A polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 5 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, or a host cell according to claim 9, for use in therapy or diagnosis of disease.

12. Use of a polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22 as an antagonist of cytokine expression and/or secretion.

13. Use of a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 5 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, or a host cell according to claim 9, as an antagonist of cytokine expression and/or secretion.

14. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22.

15. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 5 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, or a host cell according to claim 9.

16. A pharmaceutical composition according to claim 15 further comprising an additional therapeutic agent which is a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent.

17.Use of a polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22 in the manufacture of a medicament for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or inflammatory disease.

18.Use of a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 5 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, a host cell according to claim 9, in the manufacture of a medicament for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or inflammatory disease.

19.Use of i) a polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical

to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22 and ii) a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent, in the manufacture of a medicament for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or inflammatory disease.

20. Use of a polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22 in the manufacture of a medicament for administration to a patient for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or inflammatory disease wherein said patient has previously received a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent.

21. Use of a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent in the manufacture of a medicament for administration to a patient for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or inflammatory disease wherein said patient has previously received a polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22 .

22. Use of a i) polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 5 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, a host cell according to claim 9, and ii) a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent in the manufacture of a medicament for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or inflammatory disease.

23. Use of a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 5 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, a host cell according to claim 9 in the manufacture of a medicament for administration to a patient for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or inflammatory disease wherein said patient has previously received a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent.

24. Use of a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent in the manufacture of a medicament for administration to a patient for the treatment of an auto-immune disease, viral or acute liver disease, including alcoholic liver failure, skin disease, or

inflammatory disease wherein said patient has previously received a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 5 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, or a host cell according to claim 9.

25.A method of treating a disease in a patient, comprising administering to the patient a polypeptide which comprises an amino acid sequence at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence as recited in SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO:22.

26.A method according to claim 25 further comprising administering a cytokine antagonist or an anti-inflammatory agent.

27. A method of treating a disease in a patient, comprising administering to the patient a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 3, a nucleic acid molecule according to any one of claims 4 to 7, a vector according to claim 8, a host cell according to claim 9, or a pharmaceutical composition of claims 14 to 16.

28.A method for the identification of a compound that is a ligand for SEQ ID NO: 20 or SEQ ID NO: 22, comprising contacting a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4 with one or more compounds suspected of possessing binding affinity for said polypeptide molecule, and selecting a compound that binds specifically to said polypeptide.

29.A transgenic non-human animal that has been transformed to express a polypeptide according to any one of claims 1 to 4.